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South Carolina

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slaves and intemperance, even Chaplin's peers admitted that his "violent temper" which was "so entirely ungovernable," disqualified him as a religious teacher.[50]

Discipline Committees met once a month. Prior to 1845 black elders met at the church with the Committee and reported on the state of religion in their societies. Later, this procedure was discontinued. Instead, white brethern in charge of a given society met with black members one Sunday in the month and subsequently reported to the Discipline Committee, providing a list of recommendations for action. The responsibilities of the brother in charge were elaborated in the Minutes of Beaufort Church. Should any "private or personal offense be reported," he could take such action as "he may think proper." If the offense was of a "more serious character, involving immorality," it was the duty of the brother in charge to carefully investigate "the facts," report these to the church at its regular discipline meeting, and offer his recommendations. The white brother was also "authorized and expected to examine applicants for restoration" of their membership, "and if satisfied," to recommend action to the church.[51]

Thus only the "more serious" offenses got to the church discipline level, and all manner of "lapses in moral conduct" and plantation "crimes" were considered serious enough to warrant censure by the church. Slaves were suspended and excommunicated as often for "crimes" against plantation authority as for "moral" breaches. Frequently mentioned were offences such as "killing beef," "hog stealing," "barn burning" and simply "theft." Additionally, flight appeared consistently as a reason for excommunication. In 1841 for instance, bondswoman Betty was "suspended for running away," and the same action was taken against Tom for "harboring above Betty." Other reasons for excommunication were "impudence," "Sabbath breaking," "fornication" and "adultery." Occasionally slaves requested "permission to marry."[52]

The word of plantation authority subjected a slave to church discipline. As in a white court of law, a bondsperson's word was worth nothing in a white church. Monthly society discipline meetings were public. They were meant to dishonor and humiliate the slaves before each other, to admonish others against "wrong doing," and to prostrate the "guilty" before "church" law. The Gullahs were confronted with their "sins" by their earthy masters as they would face a "heavenly father" in the future. Interests of both "masters" were represented as the same so a crime against

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a slaveholder was a "sin" in the eyes of God. This outlook was pressed on children who, after 1845, sometimes received instruction on Sunday mornings in the form of oral catechism, recitation of the Ten Commandments, and prayers. Rebecca Grant recalled that in Beaufort her former owners "wouldn't miss de catechism," and they [the children], "was taught they must be faithful to the Missus and Marsa's work like you would to your heavenly Father's work." Slaves on St. Helena Island discussed "Good Billy" (William) Fripp, a Baptist master who was referred to as "good," not because of his benevolence toward his slaves, but for his avowed piety and strict sense of biblical discipline. According to the Gullahs this "leading Baptist" carried his Bible out to the fields, showed slaves "Moses' law," and then flogged them "accordin'."[33]

Baptist slaveholders applied selected scriptures to the Gullahs' daily life struggle. Planters hoped a general spirit of contrition, via a "fear of God," would prevail in the slave quarters and subvert independent thought and action. They viewed discipline meetings as having a purgative effect on the Gullahs and defeating their efforts to resist the most degrading aspects of bondage. Double jeopardy existed for these black church members. If discovered committing acts against slaveholding interests, they suffered bodily punishment. But worse perhaps was expulsion from black society, the Gullahs' primary source for freedom of expression. An excommunicated or suspended church member would receive no pass to attend a preaching place or "society" or be allowed to "hold prays." Slaveholders tried using Christianity to exercise psychological dominance over the minds of Gullahs as they employed brute force to maintain physical control. No other spiritual activity detracted from or competed with these religious tribunals. When they occurred, plantation authority insisted on the slaves' undivided attention. From the Beaufort Church Minutes we find that even the Methodist missionary's limited activities had to revolve around these assemblages:

> The Pastor to write to the Rev. Mr. Moore [Methodist Missionary] and request him to appoint any other Sabbath than the first in the month to preach on Ladies Island—as that is the day appointed for the discipline of that Society attached to this Church.[34]

White Baptists' use of church discipline to undermine the Gullahs' active indignation and struggle against bondage is evident when considering the nature of the "sins" of which black church members were found

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land, but many were taken forcibly. Gullahs risked and often lost their lives to flee, telling horror tales of death and suffering inflicted upon anyone suspected of desiring either to remain on the Sea Islands or to escape from the mainland where the planters "refugeed." The fact that they continued to flee under these circumstances is the best testimony to their sense of independence and will to freedom. One such incident was told to Laura M. Towne:

> A woman today just escaped from her owners on the Maipland. She said she had hard work to escape, sleeping in the marsh and hiding all day. She brought away her two little children. Her master had just whipped her oldest son almost to death because he was suspected of trying to join the Yankees.[45]

Although the Battle of Port Royal ended in an easy Northern victory and occupation, the rest of South Carolina remained in Confederate hands. Planters fled the Sea Island region but returned, sometimes under cover of darkness, hoping to force slaves back to the mainland. Blacks and whites picketing the region could not place men at every landing spot and Gullahs lived in apprehension of the slaveholders' return. Susannah's master returned several times, once telling slaves to burn the cotton. "Why for we burn de cotton? Where we get money then for buy clo' sho' and salt?" So instead of burning cotton, they guarded it nightly. Women kept watch and men stood ready to defend their interests when the alarm sounded. At the Oaklands plantation of rebel Baptist Dr. Sams, a field hand named Cupid told Charlotte Forten how his master had daringly returned to St. Helena, risking capture by Northern soldiers, solely to retrieve slaves. Sams attempted to cajole Cupid into cooperation:

> He ordered the people to get all the furniture together and take it to a plantation on the opposite side of the creek, and to stay on that side themselves. "So," said Cupid, "dey could jus' sweep us all in a heap, an' put us in de boat. An' he telled me to take Patience—dat's my wife—an' de chil'en down to a certain pint, an' den I could come back, if I choose. Jus' as if I was gwine to be sich a goat!" added he, with a look and gesture of ineffable contempt. He and the rest of the people, instead of obeying their master, left the place and hid themselves in the woods; and when he [Sams] came to look for them, not one of his "faithful servants" was to be found.[46]

To the end Baptists had "faith" in the "faithfulness" of their slaves, apparently believing that the white church had secured fidelity among the Gullahs. Just how far some whites took this assumption is illustrated

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by a statement issued by Prince William Baptist Church as late as May 20, 1865:

Found the following coloured members have deserted their homes, the homes of their owners and their church and we fear the Cause of God. They were excommunicated. Boston, Amy, Sallie, Jane, Hannah, Jerry, Ellen, Ransom, Rina, Abraham, Annie, etc. . . .[67]

In attempting to regiment male-female relations in the slave quarters Baptist slaveholders demonstrated the most hypocrisy and cynicism. Masters separated families by whim and will regardless of religious convictions. Baptist planters sold "Christian" slaves without trying to rationalize such sales in correspondence with the laws of God even when these sales fragmented families. "I give to my son Alec, a son of my wench, boy named Jimmy," wrote Joseph Lawton, the "illustrious" pastor of Black Swamp Church at Robertville where elaborate galleries for slaves and free blacks were constructed in 1824. Slaves lived in constant dread of separation. "Every slave know what, 'I'll put you in my pocket sir,' mean" said former Robertville slave Isaiah Butler. A Northern Baptist published an appeal to slaveholding Baptists which contained an 1835 advertisement taken from a Southern newspaper. It was a notice of an auction telling "its own sad tale," and was a comment on Southern clergymen's rationalization about slavery. The "property" of the estate of "the late Rev. Dr. Furman," prominent Charleston Baptist and supporter of religious instruction for slaves, was for sale. Aside from three lots of land and a library, there were: "27 Negroes, some of them prime, two mules, one horse and an old wagon."[68]

Yet despite frequent forced family breakups, the church was particularly pharisaical in pretending that slaves were free agents. Gullahs considered "guilty" of "adultery," for example, were excommunicated as a general rule, for according to biblical law it was a sin to "put away" one's wife or husband. This ludicrous issue was debated, however, and the charge rescinded if an individual went before the church via the black watchman or white brother in charge and asked permission to "remarry."[69] Few Gullahs took this step, seeming to prefer exercising their independence insofar as they could within a forced situation. The folly of this supposed violation of scripture was not lost to their intelligence, and they usually ignored such censures.

Slaves' wishes in choosing a mate were sometimes ignored, and unions

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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ship was worthy of admittance. The Reverend Charles C. Jones, after many years spent in preaching to sea-island and mainland slaves concluded that they were inclined to place true religion in profession, in forms and ordinances, and in excited states of feeling, and true conversion in dreams, visions, trances, and voices, "all bearing a perfect or striking resemblance to some form or type which has been handed down for generations, or which has been originated in the wild fancy of some religious teacher among them."[82] They offered these dreams and visions to the church sessions as evidences of conversion just as the whites were inclined to do in camp meetings.

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They were also quick to follow the custom of the whites in "churching" offending members. "The discipline of colored members," wrote the Reverend Mr. Jones, who, no doubt, had taken part on many such occasions, "is involved, tedious, vexatious and disgusting." Excommunications and suspensions were of "perpetual occurrence, for crimes shocking in character, and of themselves sufficient to show the general state of morals; such for example as adultery, fornication, theft, lying, drunkenness, quarreling, and fighting." The Reverend Mr. Jones thought that the Negroes perverted the gospel and colored their religious practices with their African superstitions. Thus their "doctors, prophets, and conjurers" modified the teachings of the white preachers.[83]

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The church was not only responsible for giving Christianity to the Negroes, but also to a large extent for teaching a few of them to read and write. The early statutes

[82] Jones, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes*, pp. 125, 126.
[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 127, 128.